



San Diego City Attorney **CASEY GWINN**

NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Maria Velasquez, Press Secretary (619) 235-5725

FIRST IN THE NATION--TO AIM FOR ZERO! THE SAN DIEGO FAMILY JUSTICE CENTER OPENS TOMORROW *HELPING FAMILIES BREAK THE CYCLE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE*

San Diego, CA: Domestic violence homicide is a preventable crime! San Diego has proven over the last 15 years that such murders can be prevented. Indeed, San Diego has led the nation in reducing domestic violence homicides since 1985 (down 75%), but local officials are AIMING FOR ZERO. Eight murders have taken place in the City of San Diego in this year. Now, San Diego becomes the first major city in America to aim for zero homicides with the opening of the San Diego Family Justice Center– the most comprehensive "One Stop Shop" ever built in America to serve victims of family violence. Phase I of the Family Justice Center will open on October 10, 2002 at 707 Broadway in downtown San Diego. "We are doing something that no jurisdiction in the country has done. This Center will forever change the way San Diego provides services to hurting families," said City Attorney Casey Gwinn, the architect of the Family Justice Center vision.

The San Diego Family Justice Center becomes the first program in the nation to offer in one location

- 1) an entire Police Department's Domestic Violence Unit (40 staff members),
- 2) a City Attorney's entire Domestic Violence Prosecution Unit (32 staff members),
- 3) a Forensic Medical Unit to document, evaluate and treat injuries, operated by Grossmont Hospital Sharp HealthCare (three staff members), and
- 4) Over thirty (30) community partners and other government agency partners (approximately 40 staff members), either on-site or off-site, including County probation officers, staff from Adult Protective Services and Child Protective Services, the District Attorney's Office, legal advocates to assist with restraining order preparation, victim advocates to work one on one with victims, advocacy for military families, counselors to assist with

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transportation, food, and emergency housing needs, advocates to work with children, and a host of other services.

The San Diego Family Justice Center– where families come first – is the shared vision of San Diego City Attorney Casey Gwinn and San Diego Police Chief David Bejarano. “We have the opportunity with the Justice Center to change the lives of thousands of children caught in the cross-fire of family violence,” said Chief Bejarano.

A recent study by the San Diego Domestic Violence Council found that victims currently may end going to 32 different locations to tell their story and seek professional services and support. With the creation of the Justice Center, no longer will victims and their children be forced to travel from location to location to get the help they need and relive and repeat the emotional trauma they have experienced in the process of seeking assistance.

The vision has been embraced by the Board of Supervisors, the entire state legislative delegation, the entire Congressional delegation, and the entire San Diego City Council. The vision has also been supported by County Sheriff Bill Kolender, Chief Probation Officer Alan Crogan, Jessie P. Knight, Jr., President and CEO of the Regional Chamber of Commerce, and a host of other business leaders.

Over the past 15 years, San Diego has earned a national reputation for its work to address domestic violence. There are now specialized family violence prosecutors, judges, detectives, advocates, and probation officers in our community. And despite the increasing population, the number of domestic violence homicides has dramatically dropped in the City of San Diego: 30 murders in 1986; 22 in 1991; 10 in 2001; and as of this date, 8 murders this year. But there is much more to do.

For the first time, victims will have access to a Center that includes a medical unit so that the evidence can be immediately documented. Grossmont Hospital Sharp Healthcare will operate the Forensic Medical Unit that will evaluate, treat and document a victim’s non-life-threatening injuries. Initially, it will be staffed with a part-time Medical Director , a full-time nurse practitioner and a full-time forensic evidence specialist. The long

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term goal is to fund and add a full-time Medical Director position. "This is really groundbreaking, because no one is doing these types of exams anywhere in the country," said Dr. George McClane from Grossmont Hospital Sharp HealthCare.

There are two phases to the San Diego Family Justice Center. Phase 1, opening the Center and becoming operational will successfully be completed with the opening at 707 Broadway on October 10, 2002. It was the result of many generous gifts. Over \$2 million has been raised to begin operation this week.

The California Endowment jump-started the project and many donors followed. On March 20 of this year, President & CEO Robert K. Ross, awarded the City of San Diego a \$500,000 grant and challenged the City to build the San Diego Family Justice Center. The City accepted the challenge. On April 9, Mayor Dick Murphy and the San Diego City Council approved a \$1.9-million financing plan for the San Diego Family Justice Center. "One of my 10 goals is to make San Diego America's safest city. The Family Justice Center will help achieve that goal," said Mayor Dick Murphy in supporting the effort to create Phase I of the Justice Center. "The first of its kind in the nation, it will put our resources to the best use possible in assisting victims of domestic violence."

Phase II is expanding the services of the San Diego Family Justice Center, including building a permanent home with regional centers throughout the county. While Phase I focuses primarily on services and service providers in the domestic violence arena, Phase II will seek to bring together professionals in the fields of domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse, and sexual assault. Fund-raising for this \$10-million project is now underway and will be broadened with the support of a community Gala on October 19, at the Loews Coronado Bay Resort. The Gala is close to being sold out, as the community has responded to this innovative plan to eliminate domestic violence homicides.

The prevention and healing vision of the Family Justice Center also includes developing a wakeboarding/waterski camp for victims of child abuse and domestic violence. The San Diego Center for

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Children will be working in partnership with the Family Justice Center to develop a camping facility at Lake Sutherland, between Ramona and Julian. The camp will be the first of its kind in the country.

For more information about the San Diego Family Justice Center visit www.familyjusticecenter.org

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